

THE BHĀGAVATA AND THE DHARMAŚĀSTRAS

The *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* attributed to Vyāsa alongwith all the other *Purāṇas*, enjoys an enviable position in the history of Indian literature. It is considered to be the ripen fruit of the *Vedas*. It is not only important from the philosophical, literary and linguistic but also from the religious point of view.

The *Bhāg* is replete with the materials of the *Dharmaśāstra* literature. The Chap. II of the book-vii gives a detailed account of the duties of the different caṣṭes¹, stages² and the fair sex³. Again Chapters XVII and XVIII of book-xi deal with the same topics. The consequences of those who go through the paths of smoke (*dhūmamārga*) and ray (*arcimārga*) are described in Chapter XXXII of book-iii. Besides this, we find casual references to the different topics of the *Dharmaśāstra* in the *Purāṇa*.

The *Manusmṛti*, the pivot round which the *Smṛti* literature revolves, is referred to here⁴. Not only this, even some of the passages of the

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1. MS. X.

2. *Ibid.*, II, III and VI.

3. *Ibid.*, IX.

4. *Bhāg.*, III.22.38.

yaḥ prṣṭo munibhiḥ prāha
dharmān nānāvidhān chubhān
nṛṇāṃ varṇā-śramāṇāṃ ca
sarva-bhūta-hitaḥ sadā.

MS tally verbatim with those of the *Bhāg*⁵, while some others find place in the *Purāṇa* with some changes⁶.

5. (a) *Bhāg.*, IX.19.14.

*na jātu kāmāḥ kāmānām upabhogena sāmyati
haviṣā kṛṣṇa-vartimevā bhūya evābhivardhate.*
CF. MS. II.94.

*na jātu kāmāḥ kāmānām upabhogena sāmyati
haviṣā kṛṣṇa-vartimevā bhūya evābhivardhate.*

(b) *Bhāg.*, IX.19.17.

*mātrā svasrā duhitrā vā na viviktāsano bhavet
balavān indriyagrāmo vidvāṇsam api karṣati.*
CF. MS. II.215.

*mātrā svasrā duhitrā vā na viviktāsano bhavet
balavān indriyagrāmo vidvāṇsam api karṣati.*

6. (a) *Bhāg.*, XI.17.25.

*reto nāvakirej jātu-brahma-vrata-dharaḥ svayam
avakirne'vagāhyāpsu yatāsus tripadīm jayet.*
CF. MS. II.180-81.

ekāḥ śayīta sarvatra na retaḥ skandayet kvacit

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*svapne siktva brahma-cārī dvijaḥ śukram akāmataḥ.
snātvā'rkaṁ arcayitvā triḥ punar mām ity ṛcam jayet.*

(b) *Bhāg.*, XI.21.8.

*akṛṣṇasāro deśānām abrahmaṇyo'śucir bhavet
kṛṣṇasāro'py asauvira-kikaṭāsanaṁskṛterīnam.*
CF. MS. II.23.

*kṛṣṇasārastu carati mṛgo yatra svabhāvataḥ
sa jñeyo yajñīyo deśo mleccadeśas tv ataḥ paraḥ.*

(c) *Bhāg.*, I.7.53.

brahma-bandhur na hantavya ātatāyī vadhārhaṇaḥ.
CF. MS. VIII.380.

na jātu brāhmaṇaṁ hanyāt sarvapāpeṣv api sthitam.

(d) *Bhāg.*, I.7.57.

*vapaṇaṁ draviṇādānaṁ sthānān niryāpaṇaṁ tathā
eṣa hi brahma-bandhūnāṁ vadho nānyo'sti daihikāḥ.*
CF. MS. III.379-80

*mauṇḍyaṁ prāṇāntiko daṇḍo brāhmaṇasya vidhīyate.
rāstrād enaṁ bahiḥ kuryāt samagra-janam akṣatam.*

(e) *Bhāg.*, X.29.24.

bhartuḥ śuśrūṣaṇaṁ strīṇāṁ paro dharmo hy amāyayā.
CF. MS. V.155.

patiṁ śuśrūṣate yena tena sarge mahīyate.

(f) *Bhāg.*, X.29.26.

*duḥśīlo durbhago vṛddho jaḍo rogy adhano'pi vā
patiḥ strībhir na hātavyo lokepsubhir apātaki.*
CF. MS. V.154.

*viśīlaḥ kāmavṛtto vā guṇair vā parivarjitāḥ
upacaryaḥ strīyā sādhyā satataṁ devavat paṭiḥ.*

In addition to this peculiar trait, Vyāsa, the author of the *Bhāg* defines *dharma* in his own way.

According to Manu *dharma* is that good which is pursued by the learned without attachment or detachment but associated with the concurrence of the heart⁷. Further he says that *dharma* is four fold — performance of the injunctions of the *Vedas* and *Smṛtis*, pursuing the usual practices of exemplary persons and performance of such actions which may bring mental satisfaction to the performer⁸. Later on other books of *Smṛti* literature widened the connotation of *dharma*. It denoted morality in general and fundamental virtues. Brhaspati reckons kindness, patience, purity etc. as the universal *dharma*. Vājñavalkya considers self-knowledge obtained through «*Yoga*» as the highest «*dharma*».

Now the different castes have got *dharma* of their own. As opposed to the male-folk, the female-folk claims altogether a separate *dharma* of her own.

But the *Bhāgavata* makes use of the word in an altogether different sense. It is comprised of the adoration of God devoid of worldly interests of those people who are by nature free from jealousy and have merciful outlook towards all. The thing in the hand is absolutely real, bestower of supreme bliss and undoer of three-fold misery⁹.

Śrīdharasvāmin says that adoration of God is not considered here to be a characteristic of *dharma*¹⁰. It consists of total absence of worldly interest and jealousy, but at the same time it is marked with mercy. Thus it is not an acquisition but the nature of a man got rid of all sorts of impurities. Shaking off all these impurities the spirit attains to its natural form and comes closer to the absolute truth. Perceiving such a relationship is *dharma* or adoration of God. Further the *Purāṇa* adds

(g) *Bhāg.*, XI.26.22.

athāpi nōpasajjeta strīṣu straiṇeṣu cārthavit
viṣayendriya-samyogān manāḥ kṣubhyati nānyathā.
 CF. MS. II.213.
svabhāva eṣa nārīṇāṃ narāṇām iha dūṣaṇam
ato'rthān na pramādyanti pramadāsu vipaścitaḥ.

7. MS. II.1.

vidvadbhiḥ sevitaḥ sadbhir nityam adveṣa-rāgibhiḥ
hṛdayenābhyanuñjāto yo dharmas taṃ nibodhata.

8. *Ibid.*, II.6.

vedo'khilo dharma-mūlaṃ smṛti-śīle ca tadvidāṃ
ācāraś caiva sādḥūnām ātmanas tuṣṭir eva ca.

9. *Bhāg.*, I.1.2.

dharmāḥ projjhita-kaitavo'tra paramo nirmatsarāṇāṃ satāṃ
vedyaṃ vāstavam atra vastu śivadaṃ tāpa-trayonmūlanam.
śrīmadbhāgavate mahāmuniḥ kṛte kiṃ vā parair īśvaraḥ
sadyo hṛdayavarudhyate'tra kṛtibhiḥ śuśrūsubhis tatkṣaṇāt.

10. ŚRĪDHARA, Śrīdhari, I.1.2.

kevalam īśvarārādhanā-lakṣaṇo dharmo nirūpyata iti.
adhikārito'pi dharmasya paramatvam āha.

that motivelessness and serenity of the soul which induce to devotion, are reckoned to be the supreme *dharma*¹¹. On the contrary any *dharma*, which does not lead to devotion, is labour lost¹².

Thus the *Bhāgavata* furnishes a new meaning of *dharma* which is quite unique in the realm of Indian Philosophy and religion.

11. *Bhāg.*, I.2.6.

*sa vai puṁsām paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokṣaje.
ahaitukyapratihata yayā"tmā samprasidati.*

12. *Ibid.*, I.2.8.

*dharmah svanuṣṭhitah puṁsām viṣvakṣena-kathāsu yah.
notpādayed yadi ratim śrama eva hi kevalam.*